

Ravi Khetarpal<sup>1</sup> & Hildegard Lingnau<sup>2</sup>

# The Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAR) Revived and Rebooted<sup>3</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Chair of GFAR (since 2021)

<sup>2</sup> Executive Secretary of GFAR (since 2021)<sup>3</sup> We thank Ismahane Elouafi, Georg Grossmann, Preetmoninder Lidder, Alessandro Meschinelli, Valeria Pesce and Charles Plummer for their valuable comments.

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Contents

Partnerships matter ..... 3

Our Strategic Vision ..... 4

Our vision for GFAR I: What will GFAR be doing? ..... 4

    Establishing Partnership Principles as a Global Standard ..... 5

    An Innovation Survey ..... 6

    Collective Actions ..... 6

Our vision for GFAR II: How will GFAR be working? ..... 7

Conclusion: From GFAR to GFAIR ..... 9

## Partnerships matter

It took many years for the global community to realize that global goals can only be achieved if actors around the globe coming from different constituencies partner together. To this end, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development dedicated global goal 17 to partnerships (inter alia).

But how to partner? How to turn the traditional top-down approach into a bottom-up cooperation? The OECD DAC has come up with an answer – the criteria for effective development cooperation – and monitors to what degree providers of development cooperation:

- respect the ownership of countries of the Global South; and
- align their support to countries' policies and priorities.<sup>4</sup>

In agricultural research, this is unfortunately not often realized in true sense. Agricultural research is still very much driven by a few big international players who often have their own agenda while National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) are generally not very much involved (if at all) and farmers' organisations even less so.

This is all the more surprising as insufficient partnering with countries of the Global South is a well-known problem and has been recently stressed again by the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS)

- It has been known since GFAR was established by FAO, IFAD, the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) and the World Bank 25 years ago, with the mandate “to mobilize all the stakeholders involved in agricultural research for development and support their efforts to alleviate poverty, increase food security and promote a more sustainable use of natural resources”.
- It was rightly stressed again by the UNFSS last year.: The Secretary-General's Chair Summary and Statement of Action on the UNFSS clearly states: “We must support national mechanisms that develop and implement national pathways to 2030 that are inclusive and consistent with countries' climate commitments, building upon the national food systems dialogues. With the UN system and all relevant stakeholders, including the International Finance Institutions, private sector, and civil society playing a pivotal role in supporting country implementation.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.oecd.org/development/effectiveness/>

<sup>5</sup> UN Secretary-General's Chair Summary and Statement of Action on the UN Food Systems Summit, 23.9.2021:4, see <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/news/making-food-systems-work-people-planet-and-prosperity>.

So, if the UNFSS agreed that the “follow-up to the Summit will build on existing efforts of countries and supporting organizations”<sup>6</sup>, what needs to be done in order to live up to this challenge of working in partnership – bottom-up instead of top-down?

There is no need to create a new partnership to bring together small-scale farmers, national agricultural (research and innovation) systems and other relevant actors who can bring in diverse perspectives (including indigenous knowledge and science-based evidence). It already exists: GFAR is a network of networks with 659 members in the Global South.<sup>7</sup>

The network has huge potential. Much more can and should be done to achieve the transformation of agrifood systems as set out in the five action areas of the UNFSS.<sup>8</sup> Here comes our vision about what GFAR should be doing and how it should be done.

## Our Strategic Vision

With the following we would like to highlight our strategic vision for GFAR’s way forward. This will explain GFAR’s capacity to establish it’s mission or purpose, to determine long-term objectives, to make a substantive analysis of our performance relative to other global agencies engaged in agricultural research and innovation and to set parameters for growth and value addition based on the Partnership Principles.

### Our vision for GFAR I: What will GFAR be doing?

By facilitating Collective Actions<sup>9</sup> GFAR aims to contribute to the SDGs – especially to SDGs 1, 2 and 17. As GFAR Chair and GFAR Executive Secretary we have the ambition to achieve this by making “agrifood research and innovation systems more responsive and equitable towards achieving the SDGs” (outcome).

To transform agrifood systems, small-scale farmers – whose farms account for 84% of all farms worldwide, but who operate only around 12% of all agricultural land, and produce roughly 35%

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<sup>6</sup> UN Secretary-General’s Chair Summary and Statement of Action on the UN Food Systems Summit, 23.9.2021:5, see <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/news/making-food-systems-work-people-planet-and-prosperity>.

<sup>7</sup> GFAR consists of 13 constituencies including national and regional agricultural research organisations, farmers and consumer organisations, youth and women organisations, governmental and non-governmental, from the public, but also from the private sector, all sharing GFAR’s vision and mission.

<sup>8</sup> 1. Nourish all people. 2. Boost nature-based solutions. 3. Advance equitable livelihoods, decent work and empowered communities. 4. Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stresses. 5. Accelerate the means of implementation (see UN Secretary-General’s Chair Summary and Statement of Action on the UN Food Systems Summit, 23.9.2021:5, see <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/news/making-food-systems-work-people-planet-and-prosperity>).

<sup>9</sup> “A GFAR Collective Action is a multi-stakeholder programme of work at national, regional and international level. Initiated by three or more Partners and prioritized by the Global Forum, Collective Actions always include agricultural producers and have a particular focus on women and youth.”

of the world's food<sup>10</sup> - need to be at center stage. This is the main result to be achieved by GFAR via the EC funded project "Reconnecting the world: The GFAR Partnership transforming agrifood research and innovation for development impact"<sup>11</sup>: "Farmers and communities are empowered at the center of innovation".

To truly put small-scale farmers (and among them especially female and young farmers) at center stage, they need to have stronger agency and voice (no symbolic action, no tokenism) to play their recognized role.

### Establishing Partnership Principles as a Global Standard

Keeping in view the importance of partnerships we aim to establish Partnership Principles as a global standard. Having worked in the field of agricultural research for many years we regret to say that a lot of agricultural research done until now has not been done in a way that leverage and maximize partnerships of key stakeholders on the ground. The National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) often continue to be overlooked or marginalised by well-funded global / Northern agricultural research and development institutions. This is what we hear again and again from most of our members. Even though progress is being made towards collaborative research, this is not happening in a standardized or systemic way. Oftentimes key players who often have better ideas on sustainability of the outputs and outcomes of such a research effort are not involved.

The transformation of agrifood systems can only happen if partnering with the most important actors, i.e. small-scale farmers in the Global South and with their organisations, becomes our standard modus operandi and if everything else (research, innovation, extension, training and investments) focusses on them. This requires partnering with all stakeholders, and this is why GFAR was established. It is still - and maybe more than ever - its *raison d'être*.

Accordingly, the most important mission for GFAR is to connect its members with existing agricultural research endeavours, to cooperate and to complement, not to compete with them. This is why GFAR, together with the Kommission fuer Forschungspartnerschaften mit Entwicklungslaendern (KFPE) of the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT), has developed Partnership Principles<sup>12</sup>. This is perhaps the single most important thing that GFAR can do: to establish these principles as a global standard in order to ensure that agricultural research is conceived, designed and carried out and followed-up on in partnership with the most important actors – small-scale farmers.

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<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X2100067X>.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/desira/documents/gfar-global-forum-agricultural-research-and-innovation-0>.

<sup>12</sup> The Partnership Principles are derived from the the following original KFPE's 11 principles of research partnership: 1 Decide on the objectives together; 2 Build-up mutual trust; 3 Share information; 4 Develop networks; 5 Share responsibility; 6 Create transparency; 7 Monitor and evaluate the collaboration; 8 Disseminate the results; 9 Share profits equitably; 10 Increase research capacity; 11 Build on the achievements.

By applying these Partnership Principles to our own Collective Actions and to Swiss research projects, and then bringing them to global fora (such as One CGIAR), GFAR aims to facilitate the identification and catalysation of agricultural research and innovation by and for farmers to avoid that agricultural research and innovation is done top down (instead of bottom up, id est, with and for small scale farmers in the Global South). This will facilitate largely to identify and catalyse innovations

### An Innovation Survey

Innovation is the only way the huge challenges the world is facing in terms of poverty reduction and hunger can be tackled. Innovation is about achieving better results, while maximizing impact with fewer resources / and / or different inputs. To make this magic happen, agricultural research and innovation need to be done closely with the key actors, i.e. with small-scale farmers in the field.

One example: in Palestine, where land and water are taken away from Palestinians and agriculture is down to 3% of the GDP, it was possible to launch innovative climate smart agriculture because the World Food Programme (WFP) prudently weighed people's constraints in the region to guide investment and partnerships. WFP worked with a local agricultural research organisation (Agricultural Research Institute in Jerusalem, ARIJ) leading to the co-development of small-scale hydroponic systems which the poorest of the poor were able to run on their rooftops and backyards. These not only improved their livelihoods (food, income) but also their nutrition (because the best produce to grow in these small-scale hydroponic systems are vegetables).

To find out more about the potential and constraints of innovations on the ground GFAR will do a survey among all its 659 members and by doing so complement an inhouse survey, implemented last year by FAO. We are excited to see what we will find and will follow up on our members' ideas through future Collective Actions.

### Collective Actions

Based on needs and priorities previously voiced by our members, GFAR is currently facilitating two Collective Actions: a Collective Action on Forgotten Foods and a Collective Action on Inclusive Digital Agriculture.

The Collective Action on Forgotten Foods<sup>13</sup> has facilitated broad and intensive multi-stakeholders' consultations in Africa, Asia-Pacific and the Middle East together with regional research organizations and their partners, in particular AARINENA, APAARI and FARA, supported by the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT and Crops for the Future. Thousands of actors from many countries have constituted novel communities of practices which converged on a shared perspective for the transformation of research and innovation

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<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.gfar.net/content/kfa1-empowering-farmers-center-innovation/#CA-forgotten-foods>.

systems - the Global Manifesto on Forgotten Foods<sup>14</sup> - identifying the co-innovation steps needed for unleashing the full potential of traditional crops to make agrifood systems more resilient and nutritious. The scale and scope of this initiative are unprecedented and represent a big step forward on the global forgotten foods agenda, which now can rely on a comprehensive and consistent framework: the Global Forgotten Foods Plan of Action.

The Collective Action on Inclusive Digital Agriculture<sup>15</sup> fosters farmer-centric multi-stakeholder activities leading to best practices and business models that empower farmers to play their important role as co-innovators in the design, governance and benefit sharing of Digital Agriculture solutions. The first activities started in Latin America and the Caribbean in August 2021 under a partnership between the Forum of the Americas for Agricultural Research and Technology Development (FORAGRO), the Confederation of Family Producers Organizations of the Expanded Mercosur (COPROFAM), the Global Open Data for Agriculture and Nutrition (GODAN) initiative, and the AgGateway consortium of digital agriculture solution providers. Activities are being planned in Asia Pacific under a partnership between the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI) and the Asian Farmers' Association (AFA), while an inter-regional Task Force has been established under the auspices of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA).

This year GFAR will engage in two other Collective Actions: one on Family Farming and one on Transformational Learning. The next one in the pipeline is a Collective Action which helps small-scale farmers to tackle climate change challenges. We are currently also considering a Collective Action on agroecology.

## Our vision for GFAR II: How will GFAR be working?

To revive and bring GFAR to its full potential, we also aim to improve GFAR's way of working through in-house consultations and collective wisdom in order to best serve our members.

### An independent evaluation & seven recommendations

An independent evaluation done in 2018<sup>16</sup> came up with the following seven recommendations on how to further develop GFAR:

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<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.gfar.net/documents/global-manifesto-forgotten-foods>.

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.gfar.net/content/kfa1-empowering-farmers-center-innovation/#CA-digital-agriculture>.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Engel / Patricia Biermayr-Jenzano / Nathalie Dore: GFAR – An independent forward-looking learning review 2018. See <https://www.gfar.net/documents/independent-forward-looking-learning-review-global-forum-agricultural-research-and>.

1. Continue to empower GFAR's constituencies, in particular small-scale farmers, women and youth.
2. Improve the capitalization of and learning from results of Collective Actions.
3. Develop a more explicit GFAR strategy with a focus recognizable to all.
4. Make better use of members / partners: Strengthen GFAR's presence in the regions.
5. Improve operational management, develop a *modus operandi* for identifying and supporting GFAR Collective Actions and develop a monitoring, evaluation and learning framework.
6. Develop a professional learning culture.
7. Better engage with FAO, IFAD, DeSIRA, TAP and other important stakeholders.

The revival of GFAR started in 2021 with the re-engagement of GFAR's governance bodies, that is, by calling meetings of the Steering and the Executive Committee and the election of a new Chair and Vice Chair. In 2022, regional workshops will take place to re-engage with the partners and discuss the way to go over the next years. We will recommend to GFAR members and partners the following:

Ad 1) We will do a survey and conduct regional workshops ("regional interactions") in 2022 to listen to, learn from and follow-up on interests, ideas and innovations of GFAR's 13 constituencies representing all sectors in agri-food. We will partner with the Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD) on a systematic way to make the voice of young farmers heard and taken into consideration, while also aiming to move from a gender-sensitive to a gender-transformative approach.

Ad 2) We will institutionalize learning: via a global debate series called "GFAR Talks", via regular interregional exchanges and via decentralized knowledge hubs.

Ad 3) We are restructuring GFAR and its work on fewer but more powerful work areas focusing on "putting small scale farmers center stage" (the "what") and on "Partnership Principles" ("the how"). We aim to be able to communicate in simple terms how GFAR adds unique value.

Ad 4) We are already engaging with our partners via regional workshops ("regional interactions") to see how to best decentralize GFAR. The aim is to relocate our main structure (as a "network of networks") to the field; only part of the secretariat will stay in FAO HQ in Rome to provide core support (facilitation, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning or MEL, reporting, fundraising support, advocacy, communication ...) and to tap into the expertise and experience of FAO.

Ad 5) We are working on improved operational management, on "engagement principles" and on a MEL system which will make it easier for our members and partners to engage in Collective Actions and to monitor their progress.

Ad 6) We are keen to develop a learning and innovation culture which will be driven by innovative approaches and methodologies.



Ad 7) We are grateful to FAO for hosting us and to the EC for funding us. We are working to get IFAD back as a co-facilitator and funder and hope to be able to engage more intensively with CGIAR and other important actors for the benefit of small-scale farmers in the Global South.

[Other important developments since 2018: EC DeSIRA, FAO's Office of Innovation, UNFSS21 Science Days](#)

Besides the above mentioned recommendations, other important things have happened in the meantime which we also plan to reflect and act upon:

- GFAR is funded by the EC's "Development Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture" (DeSIRA) initiative which supports actors around the world. We are not only committed to delivering as commissioned but also to join forces with other DeSIRA projects.
- We are excited about being part of the Office of Innovation and the Chief Scientist stream in FAO. This is a great opportunity for evidence-based work in an environment dedicated to innovation.
- The UNFSS Science Days held in 2021 offered a great new opportunity to engage with researchers across the globe and develop evidence-based policies.

## Conclusion: From GFAR to GFAIR

The Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAR) turned 25 last year. We did not celebrate because we are busy reviving the Forum after a period of hibernation. This is worth all efforts given that we are a "network of networks", and that networking with initiatives in the Global South is more important than ever in order to support countries and regions to achieve the SDGs with limited resources and under heavy constraints.

Our credo for GFAR of the future contains the following key elements:

- For and by small scale farmers in the Global South
- Bottom-up instead of top-down
- Innovation-oriented
- Focused on achievement of the SDGs
- Value-based (fair)

In order to reflect this new and more focused ambition we will suggest to our members and partners (coming together in the GFAR Partners' Assembly in July this year) to slightly rename ourselves from GFAR to GFAIR (Global Forum on Agricultural Innovation and Research).

This would reflect that GFAR is not just committed to research, but also to innovation. But just to add the letter "I" is not enough. According to Harald Welzer not every innovation is

progress.<sup>17</sup> Innovation is only progress if it relates to values. These are defined by the SDGs and by the Agenda 2030.

By committing GFAR to being “fair” the rewording from “GFAR” to “GFAIR” would be doing both: acknowledging the importance of innovations while clearly binding them to a value-based approach. We are conscious of the fact that changing mindsets or perceptions is not easy and we are prepared to work on that front to make our mission for GFAR successful.

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<sup>17</sup> See Harald Welzer: “Dass es in modernen Gesellschaften so viel weniger Gewaltopfer als im Mittelalter gibt, liegt nicht an besserer Waffentechnik oder an Ueberwachungskameras, sondern am Gewaltmonopol des Staates, und das ist das Ergebnis sozialer Intelligenz, nicht wissenschaftlicher. Solche Intelligenz muss sich immer auf einen normativen Zweck hin begründen, was dann herauskommt, ist nicht Innovation, sondern Fortschritt. Dass gegenwärtig der Begriff der Innovation den des Fortschritts ersetzt zu haben scheint, ist kein Zufall: denn die Innovation braucht keine normative Referenz, sie ist ja schon erreicht, wenn etwas neuer ist als etwas anderes, unabhängig von der Frage, ob es überhaupt der Erneuerung bedurfte“ (Harald Welzer: Nachruf auf mich selbst, Frankfurt 2021: 26f). In English: “The fact that there are so many fewer victims of violence in modern societies than in the Middle Ages is not due to better weaponry or surveillance cameras, but to the state’s monopoly on violence, and that is the result of social intelligence, not knowledge. Such intelligence must always be based on a normative purpose, and what then emerges is not innovation but progress. The fact that the concept of innovation seems to have replaced that of progress is no coincidence: for innovation does not need a normative reference, it is already achieved when something is newer than something else, irrespective of the question of whether it needed renewal at all.”